

Commission on Aging Annual Long-Range Planning Meeting

May 20, 2013

Present: Helen deKeijzer, Bruce Lorentzen, Peg Anderson, Laura Smits, Don Gumaer, Margarita Shapiro, Nina Daniel, Senior Center Director: Wendy Petty, Program Coordinator: Pam Wilson, Social Services Director: Charlene Chiang-Hillman, Dial-A-Ride Driver: Gordon Green, SWCAA Liaison: Meta Schroeter.

Helen convened the meeting at 9:20

Minutes: The May 6th Minutes were approved by consensus as amended.

The Commission reviewed last year's minutes from Long-Range Planning and a list of "Highlights 2010-2012" that Helen compiled. Helen gave a brief overview of the history and purpose of the meeting and some issues to be addressed. One major goal is to explore the question: "How do we build a connected, vibrant, active Senior Center with enough activities and resources to encourage and support Weston seniors who want to remain in town?"

Social Services Issues: Charlene has noted two new significant trends in town with regard to the senior population within the past 5 years. The first is that more people are bringing their aging parents into their homes and that these seniors are better taken care of. The other trend is where adult children are moving in with their aging parents, and bringing their children, creating stress on the finances of the home and adding additional stress on the seniors. The slow real estate market also keeps some seniors struggling to stay in place—they are worried about money, but can also underestimate their needs and the vulnerability of their situation, this group tends not to reach out for help. Meta suggested that we put an article in the newsletter about what's available, perhaps a column? What are the signs? The key is to raise awareness. Discussion ensued about a possible presentation/column on home safety, etc. Margarita mentioned that she and Helen would be attending an upcoming program on scams, "Keeping Your Money Safe", organized by the Ridgefield VNA and others in Redding. Charlene mentioned that the Westport/Weston Health District also does these kinds of programs. Discussion ensued about the makeup of the senior population, and the group wondered about how many stay in town vs. how many leave? Charlene provided a statistic that "60% of Baby Boomers have less than \$50,000 in savings for retirement due to the recent recession/layoffs, which has affected their pensions and future benefits. Nina suggested that we do a separate issue of the newsletter and cover all of these topics. Wendy suggested adding extra pages to one issue of the existing newsletter rather than producing a separate one and others suggested a possible fall newsletter insert for this purpose.

Helen mentioned that the Commission had also talked in the past about developing another newsletter insert idea, a mini (single page/two sided) 'Senior Services and Resources Guide'. Nina, Helen, and Margarita offered to work on these projects over the summer in consultation with Charlene, Wendy, and Pam.

Tax Relief Program: Helen reviewed a draft of questions aimed at gathering information about any senior tax abatement and other tax relief programs in area towns. Information including income limits for participation as background for consideration of whether or not to recommend an increase in Weston's abatement program level, which seems not to have been raised in over a decade. Cost of living/inflation rate data will also be investigated. Charlene pointed out the differences between tax abatement, tax deferral and tax freeze programs, and reviewed the income level restrictions as outlined in each. Charlene reiterated the initial idea of abatement was to keep seniors in town. It was also noted that as the senior population increases, it might not always be possible for all households to fully benefit because of overall program ceiling limits.

Senior Transportation: Gordon reiterated his concern about not having a dedicated back-up driver, therefore making it difficult for him to take a vacation or time-off. Even though Roy is the designated back-up driver, he has a full-time job with the town and is needed for his many varied tasks. Pam mentioned that Gordon's schedule is already full, making it difficult for new people to use the van. Bruce offered to discuss the situation with Tom Landry, Helen will attend the meeting with him. The status of the Center's 19-passenger bus, which is in decent condition but not often used, was raised and Wendy and Pam would like to offer three mid-range trips per year if Roy could be scheduled in advance to drive. Bruce and Helen will ask Tom about this also. Helen asked about longer trips and Pam suggested that the Center could also run special trips using a coach bus three times a year. It was noted that an upcoming trip to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in NYC, which is being subsidized by the Friends of the Weston Senior Activities Center to keep the cost down for all participants, is full. There was general agreement about the benefit to seniors of the Friends subsidizing three such major expeditions per year.

In addition to bus trip subsidies, Helen distributed and reviewed a working list, pulled together with Wendy and Pam, of various other development ideas for the Senior Center and Friends to discuss for possible funding. Discussion ensued about the list and about the potential value of the Commission exploring senior housing issues and researching the Stay-at Home Wilton and other 'aging-in-place' nonprofit organizations in our region to see what such a program might be for Weston.

Emergency Preparedness: Helen asked if we can remind the seniors about what to have on

hand before a major storm and suggested this also be included in a newsletter article and maybe in a piece for the paper some time in the summer/early fall.

Operations of the WSAC: Helen congratulated Wendy and Pam on the great job they have done with the Center. All agreed. Helen was pleased that the budget of the next fiscal year passed and that we were able to secure more hours for Pam and for a summer staff member while Pam is away. Following discussion, it was clear that the Commission will continue to see the importance of pushing for expanded hours of operation for the Center and for a full-time two-person Center staff, which is viewed as a matter of safety, security, and professionalism. More and more seniors are participating in Center activities and there is an increased need based on the rising numbers of senior residents staying/living in town. Charlene stated that we are the only center in the area that is still part-time. Nina suggested that the Commission write a letter to the editor of the Weston Forum to generate awareness of the greater need. There may also be a growing need to attract “young” seniors with programs in the evening. Discussion ensued about the Center’s relationship with Parks and Recreation. The garden is coming along though tree roots and shallow soil conditions are shifting planning toward greater use of containers. Parking is still a major challenge. Wendy said that she and Pam have been working with the schools and that, as of now, we expect to be in this location for at least another one to two years. There are 125 seniors currently on the much expanded email list. Alerts/reminders are sent to patrons this way. Helen encouraged everyone to try to attend a Senior Luncheon at the Norfield Parish Hall when possible.

Enhanced Print Newsletter: Helen suggested that we add color to our newsletter at least on the front and back cover and perhaps develop a logo such as a tree of life for all Center communications, including use in any future Center website, etc. Development of such an independent inter-active website was also discussed. Meta asked how many seniors were computer savvy. Wendy and Pam said that there were a few and it was noted that younger seniors are increasingly computer/internet savvy. Meta asked if the center could have more computer classes—more will be offered in the future. There was a discussion concerning possible new names for the Center.

Pam presented the multi-dimensional/holistic concept of a wheel of wellness programming an idea that was the result of her meeting with the Director of the Waveny Center in New Canaan. Helen reviewed the content of each category and members added ideas to the list of possible activities and classes.

Oral History Project: This could possibly be kicked off with a film and talk. Helen asked about

the genealogy classes. Discussion ensued.

Development Priorities: In addition to major coach bus trip subsidies mentioned earlier, Helen distributed and reviewed a working list, pulled together with Wendy and Pam, of various other development ideas for the Senior Center and Friends to consider for possible funding. Discussion ensued about the list and about the potential value of the Commission exploring senior housing issues and researching the Stay-at Home Wilton and other 'aging-in-place' nonprofit organizations in our region to see what such a program might look like in Weston. At the more immediate level, there is much need for a better copier. (Wendy and Pam have been using the one at Town Hall.) Wendy has contacted Sharon Shattuck about getting a new one for the Center, which would be very useful. Tying into the previous discussion about adding color to the newsletter, the idea of a color copier with various other features was also raised. (A cost analysis on printing the Center newsletter on our own rather than outsourcing the job might also be considered.) Wi-Fi is available in two rooms, but there is a need to expand it to include the third room near the garden.

Mindfulness Program: The latest session was not as well attended as expected. This program was also offered in Westport and had a larger crowd, more anonymity. Meta raised the idea that the Senior Lunch should be more healthful, and menus could be better. When planning with volunteer groups for next year's Wednesday lunches, Wendy will bring this up. Discussion ensued.

It was determined that there will not be a meeting in June. The next meeting will be on September 9th at 9:15 in the Senior Center.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Smits